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LBJ, Bobby Agree on CIA Issue, but Humphrey Differs

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 24—When President Johnson and Bobby Kennedy have a meeting of minds on any controversial issue like the CIA, we have an event of political importance — particularly when Vice President Humphrey doesn't see eye to eye with either on the issue.

This interesting development came Thursday when LBJ finally, through a devious process, came out in defense of the Central Intelligence Agency. His effort to boost the morale of the spyboy outfit was along the lines of Senator Kennedy's own defense of the agency Tuesday.

And it should be noted that when Senator Kennedy spoke his piece, Mr. Humphrey, in Palo Alto, Calif., was expressing great distress over the CIA's undercover financial intrusion into the national Student Association. Hubert said he was "not at all happy about what the CIA has been doing."

Should Have Kept Quiet

Mr. Humphrey's sniping was even joined in by Health, Education and Welfare Secretary Gardner, who considered the CIA's youth-organization infiltration methods a "mistake." Both Mr. Gardner and Mr. Humphrey

should have kept their mouths shut, at least pending word on the official White House line.

Mr. Gardner, as a member of the President's special CIA Review Board (along with CIA Director Richard Helms and Undersecretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach), should obviously have kept silent until all the facts were in hand by the investigatory group.

Mr. Humphrey should have kept mum for sound political reasons. He does want to run with LBJ again in 1968, and he should never box himself into a corner which gives Bobby an advantage on the Lyndon level.

This recital does not mean that Bobby and the President are finally like that, even if they agree on this one issue.

Failed to Take Stand

The chances are that the President did not like to be in the position of following Bobby in defense of the CIA — especially

when in hindsight it appeared that the White House should have defended the CIA emphatically in the beginning of disclosures, instead of naming a board to study the situation.

But Mr. Johnson failed to take that strong personal stand. As a result Bobby was able to grab the chief defender role and the headlines.

As the New York senator said, it was unfair to make the CIA "take the rap" for its undercover subsidizing operations, especially as the policy decisions are not made by the CIA, but at the highest levels of the Truman, Ike, Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

This was just about what the President finally came around to saying Thursday.

Devious Arrangement

We were tipped shortly before the White House made it known its Bobby-like views that the President was going to "get back at Bobby." But any perusal of the developments which followed showed that the President was really "trying to catch up with Bobby."

The arrangement was a devious one which fooled only the naive. On Tuesday night, the White House said, LBJ asked Mr. Katzenbach for a "status

report" on the presidential panel's inquiry. That was what was supplied and made public Thursday. It only pointed out what has been generally accepted — namely that the CIA in its youth organization financing activities has only been acting in accord with National Security Council policy decisions made in 1952 and 1954, and still in effect.

LBJ on Record

This Katzenbach document praised the CIA as composed of "many farsighted and courageous Americans" serving their country in perilous channels. Thus it supplied the President with a means of catching up with Bobby without, it was hoped, appearing to do just that. The President, it was explained, "agrees with the conclusions in this preliminary re-

port" and that was that. He was thus on record, finally. Previously he had totally sidestepped a firm position and, also through a second party, assured the educational community that he favored preservation of its "integrity and independence."

In contrast, Bobby Kennedy has spoken for himself on this subject right along. It may well be that there was evidence in the Kennedy administration record that he was actively engaged in seeing that the infiltration policy was carried out properly by the CIA.

Bobby Hurt Himself

Nevertheless, he could have been less rather than more emphatic in championing the undercover operation. He made clear to a college audience in Saratoga Wednesday that he would not swerve from his position, no matter how unpopular it might be among the students.

Bobby definitely has not gained any grass-roots political advantage on this issue. On the contrary, he has definitely hurt his image among the young voters to whom he has always most appealed, and whose support he has always striven for — even on a global basis.

But at least today he has the President on his side on the CIA issue. And Mr. Humphrey doesn't. This may not count much, in the long run, but it is an entertaining if not too happy coalition while it lasts — which won't be for long.